



# Task Force Death Dealers: Dismounted Combat Tankers

by Captain Donald Stewart, Captain Brian McCarthy, and Captain James Mullin

Iraq remains a combat zone and the enemy's tactics continue to evolve toward a form of guerrilla warfare, and the Army continues to tailor its operations to deal with the threat. Terrain, enemy, civilians, and mission — these competing factors have forced the Death Dealers of Task Force 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment (TF 1-67) to adopt an outside-the-box mentality instead of employing a traditional armor role during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The old tanker cliché of “death before dismount” has officially gone by the wayside and has led to the unimaginable dismounted armor crewmen. The current contemporary operating environment (COE) in Iraq calls for tankers to dismount. However, a large number of tankers continue to ride steel on most missions, and tanks remain a critical element in the COE.

The 3d Infantry Division's (ID) charge into Baghdad reaffirms the Abrams' speed and lethality on the battlefield. Continuing this trend, the 4th ID employs tanks daily and continues to engage the enemy with its M1A2SEP. Firepower and accuracy, psychological effect, speed, and survivability — the tank brings all of these to the fight.

When thrust into an urban environment, tanks can act as mobile roadblocks or control crowds with engine exhaust. This ar-

ticle addresses terrain, civilians, enemy threat and weapons, and friendly tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP), and encourages follow-on forces to form training plans at home station prior to deploying. The Death Dealers are doing nothing revolutionary in Southwest Asia, but these issues do warrant the attention of the force so that follow-on forces can train to prepare for Iraq's COE.

## The Terrain

A country the size of California, Iraq has several distinctly different environments. Central Iraq, the 4th ID's area of operations, is definitely not a desert environment. There is a fair share of sand and open terrain in the area, but central Iraq is primarily in the Tigris River valley.

Besides palm groves and farmland, the Tigris, Euphrates, and Diyala Rivers further divide the country. Additional obstacles include large concrete canals, some as wide as 6 meters and as deep as 4 meters. Additionally, farmers have cut numerous canals and irrigation ditches throughout the land, few of which are represented on maps; on imagery it is impossible to tell the extent of the irrigation. Cross-country travel, although possible in the area, is limited by both the thick palms and irrigation canals.



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We conduct many operations in urban areas, which presents an additional set of issues. In many cities, the infrastructure has crumbled from more than a decade of neglect. The streets are narrow, many with a web of low-hanging power lines and canals that impede vehicle movement. Additionally, most families have adobe walls ranging in height from 1-to-3 meters surrounding their homes.

Task Force 1-67 has found it necessary to confirm routes into and out of an area, and when at all possible, conduct a reconnaissance of all routes. Additionally, we found that in built-up areas, the military grid reference system (MGRS) gives way to a terrain index-reference system (TIRS) and an urban reference system. Our brigade combat team (BCT) has a consolidated TIRS overlay. When planning missions, the task force uses Falcon view and ArcView satellite imagery and tactical unmanned aerial vehicle shots, on which we then number all of the buildings within the target area of operations to give ground and air elements a common, more precise set of graphic control measures.

### Civilians

Iraqis tell us regularly, and it is probably true, that 90 percent of the Iraqi people want us here and appreciate what we are doing. The other 10 percent becomes the problem when trying to maintain stability among an entire population. Force protection must always be the primary focus. The Iraqi people, especially the children, are very friendly and courteous. They have had little to no exposure to the outside world for more than 30 years and are eager to learn about Americans and want to engage soldiers in conversation. Generosity and gift giving are cornerstones of their culture, and because of this, it is difficult not to become complacent.

Everyone has a weapon. When the Hussein regime fell, soldiers simply left their posts and ran home, many with as much armament as they could carry. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), assault rifles, and mortars are the weapons of choice. Most citizens were merely looking for self-defense against the ever-present Ali Babba; but the more nefarious purchased and stockpiled weapons for anticoalition activities. They have them in their homes and cars, and buried in yards and gardens. The arms deal-

ers and anticoalition personnel with large weapons caches use any means to hide weapons, to include hiding them in Mosques and cemeteries. Dismounted units carry AN/PSS-11 mine detector sets to search for buried weapons and contraband. The mine detectors work well when adjusted properly — we have found weapons buried up to 2-feet deep.

To better protect our soldiers and combat complacency, especially at fixed sites, we rotate troops often. Each company has an area of responsibility, so soldiers become familiar with the area and its people, and can spot when something has changed or does not seem right. We have also installed Kevlar doors on all M998s to offer increased protection against small arms and thrown objects.

### Enemy

The enemy continues to refine their tactics. One of those foreign to the Death Dealers before deployment was using improvised explosive devices (IED). There is a plethora of ordnance throughout the country, giving prospective bomb makers a great deal of ammunition. We have encountered IEDs that have been rigged in soda cans attached to telephone poles; 1.5-liter water bottles left on the road; explosives stuffed in the carcasses of dead animals; and 155mm artillery shells, daisy-chained together and placed along the shoulder of routes used mainly by coalition forces.

Vehicle commanders and drivers need to be observant of objects and loose soil in and around the roadway. Also, look for berms and structures 20 to 30 meters away from your location that can provide cover and concealment from which to command detonate devices. Once we identify an IED, we establish a cordon 300 meters away from the device and secure the area. The tactical operations center will then contact the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and they will assess the situation.

Additionally, avoid setting a routine. The enemy continually collects intelligence, knows soft points, and is acutely aware of times, routes, and composition of logistical convoys. Unlike conventional operations and experiences at combat training centers where it is important to establish a battle rhythm, in Iraq we found that unpredictability is essential to force protection. We have also conducted offensive operations against our resident bombers. Using pattern and terrain analysis techniques, the task force S2 identified areas where IEDs were prevalent or likely. We used two tanks to establish observation posts and await am-



bush opportunities. From a distance of over one kilometer, the section engaged and observed several individuals drive up to the target area, dig holes in the roadway, lay wires, and began removing artillery shells from the bed of their truck.

### Rocket-Propelled Grenades

RPGs are simple and inexpensive enemy weapons. The enemy uses them to snipe at convoys in an effort to execute an ambush. The RPG attacker prefers a concealed position from which he can see vehicles approaching along the route. Typically, they shoot at night with either no sight or a crude sight, and likewise, are not very accurate.

As with IEDs, leaders must look at locations conducive for firing RPGs. It is imperative that crews maintain individual sectors and sections maintain sectors. Scanning discipline is key because the launch flash of an RPG only lasts about a second, and soldiers must act quickly to capture or destroy the enemy before he flees the scene.

### Friendly TTP

Due to the nature of current combat operations in Iraq, our primary mounted maneuver unit is the section. Tank sections conduct mounted patrols, and therefore, conduct actions on contact as a section. New lieutenants and staff sergeants are oftentimes senior leaders on the ground and must know how to react to any situation. At home station, tactical vignettes can be used to rehearse actions on contact so that these section leaders, tank commanders, gunners, loaders, and drivers know what to expect and have an idea of how to react. As in any situation, we continue to refine and rehearse our actions and TTP. As previously mentioned, leaders must know and rehearse individual and section sectors of fire.

### Dismount!

Task Force 1-67 is a tank-heavy Force XXI task force with two pure M1A2SEP tank companies, an M2A3-equipped mechanized infantry company, a headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), and a forward support company (FSC). While an awesome organization designed for high-intensity combat, it is not the optimal task organization for our current battlefield in northeastern Iraq. After 3 months of dismounted patrols and raids, our infantry brothers, scouts, and mortars were working non-stop, and to be perfectly honest, the 19Ks were tired of hearing the words "traffic control point." In an effort to maximize combat power and maintain flexibility, the task force instituted a dismounted training plan.

Initially, the plan was to train tankers on the basics of dismounted security and patrolling so they could conduct dismounted patrols in the tank company's area of responsibility (AOR), and facilitate interaction with the Iraqi people. However, after a couple of dismounted armored crews were trained, we realized it offered greater flexibility to the task force in the form of increased capability — more boots on the ground — across the full spectrum of operations.

Since validation in country, our dismounted tankers perform a myriad of tasks. They conduct foot patrols throughout their AORs, stand sentry in watchtowers, and execute raids, including air inserting onto objectives. In preparation for deployment in the COE, units must cross-train soldiers on basic infantry tasks. When possible, get the infantry involved. They are the subject-matter experts, and having infantry involved in training your tankers fosters mutual team spirit and confidence. At a minimum, train basic patrolling and focus on built-up areas and actions on contact. If possible, incorporate an expert and train room-clearing techniques.

Air insertion has been key to gaining surprise and quickly securing an objective. As 19Ks are generally not familiar with Army aircraft, units need to familiarize them with both UH-60s and CH-47s. Schedule static load training at home station regularly to train and familiarize crews. Training before you arrive puts you ahead of the power curve.

### Equipment

Increased dismounted operations have necessitated redistribution of equipment. As tank companies traditionally do not train to operate dismounted, they are likewise not equipped to operate dismounted. For instance, we have to cross level M16/M4s within companies to fully equip two squads. Cross leveling across the task force allows us to operate like this regularly. Lack of night vision devices is the biggest shortfall. Additionally, more wheeled assets, squad radios, such as integrated communications and laser-designating devices, would help conduct dismounted operations more safely and efficiently.

Operational readiness has been difficult to sustain. High operational tempo coupled with extreme temperatures has reduced mean time failure on many assemblies. Road wheel arms and engine exhaust seals have been the two biggest problems. The



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supply system took a while to catch up with both the distances and the demand, but is now consistent, if not swift. Be flexible in your task organization; you cannot use it if it is broken. We regularly used tanks with broken number two arms on perimeter guard—they could fight but could not roll outside the gate.

Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2)—the backbone of Force XXI—has worked very well. It gives us an amazing advantage over the enemy. The ability to pull up imagery, quickly analyze a route (to include march time based on the route speed), the ability to navigate along that route, and the situational awareness to see all of your units vectoring in on the target is amazing. It is a beautiful sight to watch the FBCB2 screen and see all of your units closing on the objective from multiple directions, on time, as planned, all while keeping radio chatter to a minimum.

Vehicle commanders can post enemy icons to orient friendly units. Additionally, FBCB2 has allowed us to operate over extended distances because it retransmits through any system, not just those operating on our net identification. If we get out of voice communication range, we can usually send a text message (e-mail) situation report or spot report. Like any electronic system, it does not fare well in extreme heat, and repair parts have been slow to arrive, but it definitely has given us a marked advantage.

## Civil Affairs

Prepare your company fire support officer (FSO) to be your civil affairs/information officer. As a company commander, I was responsible for a town of about 10,000 people, including the function of the town. The executive officer was the security officer, and platoon leaders served as minister of public works (water and electricity), minister of oil (gas and propane), and minister of education. The FSO tracked the progress and kept a database of people and locations within the town. The task force set up city councils in each of the larger towns within the area of operations so that with our help, they could get the city functioning until the government was running. Our focus was to help in whatever way we could to get the city functioning.

It is also necessary to include cultural awareness training in your home station training plan. Many Arab conventions are quite different from ours, especially regarding women. For exam-

ple, in the Arab culture a man is forbidden to touch a woman unless they are married. To maintain cultural sensitivity and facilitate cooperation between Iraqis and Coalition Forces, our task force created female search teams. The task force deploys a team of female soldiers from the FSC on

every raid and to every deliberate checkpoint. These soldiers underwent training from the military police and linguists regarding personnel searches and cultural awareness.

Although focused for a high-intensity conflict, Iraq has shown that our TTPs have to adjust to the changing environment. Flexibility is the key. We are not breaking any new ground, merely raking over it. Tanks continue to provide overwhelming firepower, protection, and shock effect to any fight. However, to be successful in the COE, we must remain flexible and continue to evolve in our tactics, training, task organization, and equipment. Missions require only the services of highly trained, motivated soldiers, like the dismounted armor crewmen of TF 1-67 Armor.



*CPT Donald Stewart is currently en route to his new duty station at the Combat Maneuver Training Center, Hohenfels, Germany. He received a B.A. from Bellarmine College in Louisville, KY. His military education includes Armor Officer Basic Course, the Armor Captains Career Course, and the Combined Arms and Services Staff School. He has served in various command and staff positions, including commander, B Company, 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment (1-67 AR), 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Iraq and Fort Hood, TX; assistant S3, 1-67 AR, Iraq and Fort Hood; executive officer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division (M), Schweinfurt, Germany; executive officer, B Company, 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment (1-77), 1st Infantry Division (M), Kosovo and Schweinfurt; platoon leader, C Company, 1-77 AR, 1st Infantry Division (M), Kosovo and Schweinfurt; and assistant S4, 1-77 AR, 1st Infantry Division (M), Schweinfurt.*

*CPT Brian McCarthy is currently serving as an assistant S3 with Task Force 1-67 AR, 4th Infantry Division (M), in Iraq. A graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, he received his commission through officer candidate school. His various duty assignments include executive officer and scout platoon leader, E Troop, 9th Cavalry, 3d Infantry Division (M), Fort Stewart, GA; and scout platoon leader, 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry, Camp Garry Owen, Korea.*

*CPT James Mullin is currently serving as commander, B Troop, 1-67 AR, 4th Infantry Division (M), in Iraq. He received a B.S. from the United States Military Academy. He has served in various positions, including S3 Air, 1-67 AR, Fort Hood, TX and Iraq; executive officer, C Company, 1-77 AR, 1st Infantry Division (M), Schweinfurt, Germany; platoon leader, C Company, 1-77 AR, 1st Infantry Division (M), Kosovo and Schweinfurt, Germany; and assistant S3 (LNO), 1-77 AR, 1st Infantry Division (M), Kosovo and Schweinfurt, Germany.*